

EUROFOUND PROJECT

**Families in the economic crisis: mapping policy
responses in 5 European Member States**

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Portuguese Report

In-depth analysis of three family policy changes

Task 7

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Introduction

The following 3 policy measures/developments have been selected for analysis in Portugal:

- **Delegation to local level** (municipalities, local councils, schools etc.): the aim is to understand how local councils and other institutions such as schools or civil society organizations are stepping in to support needy families in times of crisis. Which strategies are being implemented at a local level to compensate for gaps in state support? With what means? And how do these actors perceive the impact of the crisis on families and the existing measures of support?
- **Income support for disadvantaged families** (RSI): the aim is to understand to what extent this type of measure has impacted favorably on these families' capacity to face poverty and to provide well-being for young children in spite of difficulties (e.g. high levels of indebtedness, undernourishment).
- **Third sector canteens/food banks** : the aim is to understand how NGOs which have taken on this task, with or without public subsidies, are responding to disadvantaged families' difficulties in this domain and how they perceive the gaps and problems in providing support and assess the public subsidizing of this measure.

Other topics were analysed in addition to the discourse of local stakeholders and families on these three social policy measures. Local stakeholders were asked their opinion on the main changes in family support since 2010; what the impact of the crisis has been on local institutions and the families they support; what is their assessment of public policies in the current context and what are their suggestions for the future.

In order to get a grounded account of the impact of current policy perspectives, a case study approach was adopted. The municipality of Odivelas (with a focus on one of its parishes, Ramada) was chosen as the locus for data collection. Odivelas is a large municipality on the outskirts of Lisbon and has been developing multiple strategies, both at the municipal level and in collaboration with non-governmental institutions, to help families deal with the impact of the economic crisis. Local actors and institutions were also open to observation due to previous collaboration with the Observatory on Families and Family Policies (OFAP). Interviews and observation were organized along the following lines:

- 8 local actors, including: two representatives of local authorities (the vice-president of the Ramada Parish and a member of the local council who is also a school teacher; the Director of *Centro Comunitário e Paroquial da Ramada* (CCPR – Ramada Parish and Community Centre), a publicly funded non-profit NGO; two social workers from that Centre; two members of the *Movimento Odivelas no Coração* ("Odivelas in my heart" movement – a co-operative movement providing

support to disadvantaged families in the Odivelas district); and a member of the parents' association in a local school;

- 7 interviews with disadvantaged families/persons. The sample included: 2 lone parents with small children; 1 lone parent with a dependent disabled child; 1 couple with children; 1 complex family household; 2 single persons living alone.

1. DELEGATION TO LOCAL LEVEL

Local strategies to support families in times of crisis are mainly developed within institutions belonging both to the local councils and to third sector institutions, some linked to church organizations and others to citizenship associations. The active role of the social sector and civil society have been crucial in the search not only for responses to the need to provide stronger support to those locked into permanent poverty, but also for solutions in the new situations of families in need as a result of the current economic and social crisis.

The ***Centro Comunitário Paroquial da Ramada (CCPR)***, a publicly funded non-profit NGO, established in 1997, is located in the Ramada parish. It provides a variety of forms of support: day centre, home help, temporary shelter for children at risk, canteen, psychological and legal advice centre and volunteer services.

With the crisis, the Centre broadened the range of services it provides. A charity shop set up in its premises sells clothes at low prices. A technical helpdesk was set up to assist the unemployed in finding work, as was a subsidized canteen. There are quite a large number and variety of users of this canteen (it serves 83 users, providing 106 meals a day, and 212 at weekends). It provides support to all types of family (extended, nuclear, lone-parent or individuals) regardless of any state benefits they may be receiving (Unemployment benefit; Social Integration support; Disability benefit; Retirement pension, etc). The Centre also distributes food parcels every two weeks.

Another form of assistance this institution started providing was help in looking for a job, by publicizing jobs advertised in wider-circulation newspapers and by preparing resumés for users of the canteen who are unemployed or whose unemployment benefit is almost at an end.

In its specific attributions the Ramada Parish Council (***Junta de Freguesia da Ramada***), has sought to develop a series of measures in support of the community. To this end, it established a legal aid and counselling service and set up the Parish Support Committee. This committee operates in a network of institutions and organizations in

the Odivelas municipal district (Social Security, the Ramada Parish and Community Centre, Parents' Associations, the Committee for the Protection of Minors, the Portuguese AIDS League, the Portuguese Cerebral Palsy Association, etc.). Its main aim is to find solutions for people and families needing social and economic support.

The "Odivelas in my Heart" movement (***Movimento Odivelas no Coração*** - MOC) originally arose as part of a political campaign for the office of mayor. Following its rejection by the national Parliament, the movement in 2004 became an association of residents seeking to contribute to the well-being of disadvantaged families in the Odivelas district and to greater welfare and civic work. To this end it made an agreement with the Food Bank Against Hunger (*Banco Alimentar Contra a Fome*) and works together with several publicly funded non-profit NGOs (whether or not they are tied to the Church), the Dona Estefânia hospital, parish councils, and the Odivelas Town Hall. Currently the MOC is providing support to 161 families, a total of 480 people, including 16 babies (aged 0 to 24 months); 111 children (aged 2 to 12) and 33 elderly parishioners (over 65).

MOC's income comes from membership dues, food drives, leisure and cultural activities, and both corporate and individual donations. All their work is carried out by volunteers.

Parents' Associations in the schools belonging to the Ramada schools group are key actors in identifying new instances of financial and social need, in being part of a local support network and directing those in need to support institutions. Parents are in close touch with school life and, in conjunction with school administrations, are engaged in an ongoing effort to understand the needs of pupils and their families.

When asked about the importance of their activities on the ground, some stakeholders say they feel they are carrying out tasks which should be performed mainly by the state. They feel that since the crisis erupted the government has delegated family support to local institutions.

"We have a state that doesn't work! That is why increasingly - and just as well - there are organizations like ours, who do it for "love" (...) and are taking the place of the state! We are a third army working for the state, and for which the state doesn't pay a cent! It is the organizations in this area of Social Welfare, which is what they should be doing, but we are the ones who have to get together to do it."

President and volunteer with MOC

The strategy of local institutions to compensate for gaps in state support is, first and foremost, the creation of networks and partnerships and also to organize the collection of goods in kind (food, clothes, etc.) and money.

"Help doesn't come from above, it comes from those who are side-by-side. The lack of response in our area makes us feel powerless, it has to be done in

partnership (...) We have a partnership with a Caritas project, that is the Solidarity Church (...) they've already given 700 euros, three rents (...) Caritas is a big help (...) We also have partnerships with the Banco Alimentar (Food bank), which assists us ... and "Entreaajuda" [a Mutual Help organization] helps us a great deal with furniture and appliances." Vera, Social Worker with the CCPR

"We also draw on other forms of support, for example this Christmas we had a donation from the Islamic community. They have always worked with us, they gave us a nice donation which covered the costs of Christmas 'bacalhau' [salt cod dinners] (...) We managed to get support from the Banco Alimentar... then we had to go to Lisbon to get the box – which meant we had to get transport ...we went to the Odivelas parish council and they agreed to provide the transport; then we needed another one, which we managed to get from the Odivelas town hall." - the President of the MOC.

These institutions also look for support from the corporate sector, and by organizing petitions (the MOC, for example, organized a petition at the Ramada Secondary School).

"With the crisis, we had to get more partnerships with other institutions in the district. We weren't able to respond to all the demand. We had a great deal of support from Jerónimo Martins, which is the owner of the Pingo Doce supermarket chain. The Pingo Doce store in the Odivelas Strada Outlet gives us all the stuff that is past its sell-by date. Everything, from toilet paper, detergent, food... their kitchen often rings us to say, for example, "We've got 50 rice puddings! And so off we go! We have a lot of meals to prepare ... just in the Canteen it's 110 (...) We are also part of Missão Sorriso ("the Smile Mission", a charity initiative of the Continente supermarket chain), Manuel António da Mota... so there are all these small things which help us to improve our resources." Vera and Cátia, Social Workers at the CCPR.

"At Christmas time this year we had donations from a private company, based here in the district, they gave us bacalhau [salt cod] (...) and we also joined a campaign by the Lidl supermarket to set up a nursing and other support service for single mothers." President of the MOC

"We have to commit to the policy of proximity. We have to try to solve day-to-day problems informally, and at the same time direct larger problems to the social solidarity NGOs (IPSS) and other associations which may be able to help." Tita, a teacher and Representative on the Ramada Parish Council

The impact of the crisis on local institutions

With the crisis, some users of local support services became unable to pay their monthly subscriptions. This led to a drop in income and worsened the financial situation.

“The crisis has brought a decline in our income, greater financial hardship, more constraints. Although people say there isn’t any inflation, prices went up with the increase in VAT (...) The state hasn’t cut anything, but our income comes from the monthly subscriptions and from the state. Monthly subscriptions paid by users went down.” Cristina Rafael, Director of the CCPR.

Means and resources are increasingly struggling to meet the daily demand for help from these institutions.

“Applications for support are increasing all the time. For example, in some months we had 7 applications, now it’s always 10 or more. And our resources are getting more limited, do you see?” Vera, Social Worker with the CCPR

The number of applications for support has grown to such an extent that local support institutions have started to turn some down, so waiting lists have grown.

“We started to see the situation changing. Around 2012, 2013 MOC grew exponentially. At one point we were the only institution in Odivelas accepting families. The other Associations, the IPSS (subsidized Institution of Social Solidarity), etc., couldn’t take on any more applicants (...) and since then the crisis has led to more people needing support, and because the Food Bank is going through a very difficult period, it is close to breaking point”. António Boa-Nova, member of the board and volunteer at MOC

Lastly, the crisis has highlighted the need to provide families with certain specific types of support. The most serious and frequent issue is housing. Stakeholders mention a significant lack of resources in this area, in terms of both available public sector housing and the financial support they are able to give (paying the rent so as to avoid eviction, getting help with utility bills). Solutions here are therefore nearly always ad hoc.

“We can’t do it ... we have to try...we often feel the person is at risk of being evicted, isn’t it? And they say to us: “Help us, tell the Town Hall about us... get us a Council house, anything at all...and the fact is we know that there are no answers coming from the other side, there aren’t any houses ... and many people say: “what am I going to do?” Vera, Social Worker at the CCPR

Apart from the housing problem, stakeholders stress the need to diversify and innovate in terms of welfare support. For example, there is a need to help the unemployed find work or training (some institutions, like the CCPR, have set up a

helpdesk to provide this form of support), and to reinforce psychological support and help for the victims of domestic violence. They also frequently mention the need to set up more facilities for children and the elderly, and to organize proximity policies more effectively, based on regular visits to disadvantaged families and individuals. They would also like to extend their opening hours and take on permanent staff.

"I feel there is a need for support at home ...the psychologist charges for home visits, so some of them don't want them. If it is us providing the service, I go with the psychologist, and that's different, that's a service provided by the institution ...it would probably also make sense to have a cultural events organizer ..." Vera, Social Worker at the CCPR

Despite the fact there is state support for setting up canteens and local partnerships, and resources can be obtained from a wide variety of institutions (companies, the *Banco Alimentar*, Caritas, petitions, etc.) stakeholders stress that lack of resources for providing support is a constant.

"We are so used to the lack of resources that we manage to do a lot with a little. I think we're so used to it that we have become less demanding. If only we could provide answers for the people who come to us, come to us with a problem and some of them we just can't help, we can't always help because there aren't the resources or the solutions." Vera, Social Worker at the CCPR

Stakeholders' perceptions of policy changes

In overall terms local stakeholders believe current policy measures fail to provide stable, long-term solutions and often fail to take into account all the real needs of disadvantaged persons and families.

"In policy terms, what's really missing is networking. Policy is macro, it's very interesting at the macro level, but then it stays "up there" to such an extent that legislators forget all about those of us who are "down here." António Boa-Nova, Member of the Board and Volunteer at MOC

"Public policies are generally 'seat-of-the-pants' stuff. They are one-off! Measures taken to deal with a problem there and then, urgent ad hoc measures ... they just deal with the odd problem here and there, that's all" Cristina Rafael, Director of the CCPR (IPSS)

"(Public policies) have been terrible. All they've done is make the people poorer. There is no support, they cut it, there's no employment policy, and funding has been cut for the institutions, which are the people still on the ground.. If they don't cut the funding, they cut the welfare support to users, so it's the same difference."

There's no family support policy any longer. They're on their own." Tita, teacher, Representative on the Ramada Parish Council

Questioned as to the main changes in family support policies, all stakeholders highlighted the cuts or reductions in two main benefits: Income Support (RSI) and Family Benefit. With the cuts to these two forms of family and child benefit and the changes in their eligibility criteria, families which were already in need have witnessed a considerable worsening in their circumstances.

"The big change in family support was the cut in RSI (Income Support), this made life much more difficult for families which were already in need. Then family benefit was reduced or cut for some, and that too produced a decline in family incomes." Cristina Rafael, Director at the CCPR

"The biggest crime was taking Family Benefit away from thousands of families and thousands of children! It was a perfectly heinous crime. There's just no rhyme or reason to it. Just because people earned a few euros more, the benefit was withdrawn." António Boa-Nova, Member of the Board and Volunteer at MOC

"Cutting the value of RSI and taking Family Benefit away was the worst thing they did. People relied on that money to live. The middle classes lost the little they were getting, and those who were already vulnerable had their RSI cut." Elsa Mota, Member of the Parents' Association at the Ramada Secondary School

Stakeholders also mention, in addition to the cuts to the above-mentioned benefits, the negative impact of the complex bureaucratic procedures involved in obtaining and renewing welfare benefits. The example most frequently cited is RSI renewals. Some families have had to wait several months to have their RSI renewed, and so they look to the institutions for help.

"When that happens ...we monitor the situation here and suddenly we find the Social Security department is taking 2, 3, 4 or 5 months to renew their RSI. Some of them come to us and say: I just can't manage this month, I didn't get my RSI... We are able to help them, sometimes by donating the corresponding amount, at other times by lending it to them." Cátia, Social Worker at the CCPR

2. INCOME SUPPORT FOR DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES (RSI)

In focusing on RSI, stakeholders maintain that government cuts in this area of support to disadvantaged families had negative effects.

"There've been drastic cuts in RSI. This had a major impact on people's lives. We see some fairly elderly people who can't get jobs and receive a very small amount of income support and of course they need the Canteen; we also have younger people receiving income support because they lost their jobs, but it's also very little

so they come to us; then we have those no longer entitled to income support who need the Canteen in order to survive.” Cristina Rafael, Director of the CCPR

With the changes to the eligibility criteria for this benefit many families had to seek help from the subsidized NGOs (IPSS) and other local bodies. Moreover, it is the Social Security offices themselves which direct people to local charitable support institutions.

“We get a lot of people coming here who’ve been referred to us by Social Security ... There are more and more of them. Most of the time they (the Social Security staff) don’t know what to do. Many people applied to Social Security to enquire if they are entitled to Income Support, and they aren’t, because the criteria have changed. Not many people are entitled to it, so they send them to us. We try to help, and the Canteen is the thing we use most.” Cátia, Social Worker at the CCPR

“People come to us and ask for help. They tell us they’ve lost Income Support. All we can do is advise them and direct them to local institutions here. There’s no point sending them to Social Security” Tita, teacher, Representative on the Ramada Parish Council

All stakeholders see Income Support as the most important welfare benefit for providing support to disadvantaged families.

“RSI (Income Support) is incredibly important! If it wasn’t for this measure, a lot of people would be out on the street. In many cases it is the family’s only income, even if it is much less than it was before.” Cátia, Social Worker at the CCPR

“If it wasn’t for RSI I think a lot of kids couldn’t come to school!” Elsa, Representative of the Parents’ Association at the Ramada Secondary School

Family Points of View

Even though Income Support (RSI) has been cut, all those interviewed said that this benefit has a major impact on their lives. In many cases, it is the only form of family subsistence, and families rely on this money to pay all their bills. Here is one of those stories:

P. aged 62, married, Year 9 adult education course, Unemployed, Couple with no children

Ever since he arrived from the overseas colonies P. has been in the building trade, where he has worked “all his life”. He says he built all the apartment buildings in the new neighbourhoods in the Odivelas and Ramada area, but he himself was living in a wooden shack with a corrugated iron roof, next to

the Odivelas stream. Long before the current crisis, the building industry was showing signs of recession, and P. was one of its first “victims”. When he applied for unemployment benefit, P. discovered that not all his employers in the building industry had paid contributions to Social Security, so his unemployment benefit was very low. Meanwhile, his wife also lost the cook’s job she had had for a long time. When their unemployment benefit came to an end, and with no prospect of work, they applied for RSI (€320 per month) and access to the Social Canteen (lunch and dinner daily). It was with these two forms of support that they finally managed to rent a small apartment for €140 a month, in a run-down part of Odivelas. With successive cuts in family support, as a result of austerity measures, P. and his wife saw their income decline substantially, from €320 a month to €280 and then to €267. On this P says: *“If they make any more cuts I can’t deal with anything any more. We received our income support this month and went to pay the electricity, water and grocery bills ... all we were left with was a 10-euro note ... we know that we’ll be eating bread for the rest of the month.”*

Other interviewees have also had cuts in their incomes.

“I started out with 210 euros of RSI, but now with the cuts they say it can’t be more than 180 euros, and because my son gets his pension of 42 euros, I get 154, they say it’s too high and I can’t have any more support! I pay a rent of 274 euros and have to ask for help to pay it.” M., aged 64, a widow, with a technical qualification equivalent to Year 9, lone parent family, dependent son with mental disabilities.

“We are six brothers and sisters. My mother says that RSI is just going down all the time. I come here to the Canteen to eat, if it goes down any more I just don’t know what we’re going to do.” X., aged 26, single, Year 9 of schooling, studying for a technical qualification, couple with children and grandchildren.

3. THIRD SECTOR CANTEENS/FOOD BANKS

Local authorities and members of parents’ association in schools who were interviewed considered that the publicly-subsidized canteens are an important measure in times of crisis, even if they do not solve overall material deprivation. Quoting a member of the local council:

“The social canteens have helped a lot of people. It’s an important measure. Here at the local council we cannot help people directly, we cannot provide benefits in kind, we do what you call the politics of proximity. We try to solve daily problems of families by sending the cases to the institutions that are part of our Social Commission or to others that can help solve specific problems. We send a lot of people to the Community Centre that has the Social Canteen, but we also send

some people to the food bank.” Tita, teacher, Representative of the Ramada Parish Council

One of the local institutions which helps families by providing meals and groceries is the Ramada Parish Community Centre (*Centro Comunitário Paroquial da Ramada - CCPR*) whose services include the Social Canteen and Social Refectory. The Canteen provides 106 meals a day (210 on Fridays) and the Refectory serves 85 hot meals to users who have no cooking facilities or are homeless. In addition, this body provides some help to families by distributing bags of groceries every two weeks.

“With the crisis we started a new welfare service, the Social Canteen, and with this we added over 100 meals per day (...) the need also arose to help families with grocery bags very two weeks. These are not part of the Social Canteen service, but every fortnight they came and collect this support. Cristina Rafael”. Director of the CCPR

“The “Social Canteens” emerged in 2012 following the agreement with Social Security, and we’re seeing increasing numbers of requests for help all the time, coming from all the bodies, Social Security, lots of others ... the Town Hall ...” Cátia, Social Worker at the CCPR

According to one of the social workers at the CCPR, when families have no entitlement to any other form of support from the state, the Social Canteen service is the one they most often resort to, and has immediate effects in providing help to those who most need it. However, she also mentions that there is not much flexibility in the number of meals subsidized by Social Security.

“The Social Canteen service is very important. It has helped a lot of people. It’s the service we use most, it is the first step taken when the family has nowhere else to go for support. For many of them it is the only food they get.” Cátia, Social Worker at the CCPR

“As a matter of fact I have the forms here from Social Security, the amounts they give us ... they provide support for 100 meals a day, we have to put 100 meals down on the form, but the reality is that we go over 100 meals. And we ourselves, the management and the institution itself, I think this is good, we are keeping a very close eye on all these social issues as they arise. So we have to say we have 100 meals, but if a large family turns up here, we have to examine our consciences and say, look, they really need it ...they aren’t getting anything, there’s hunger in that family ... our management gives us the green light.” Cátia, Social Worker at the CCPR

MOC, the *Movimento Odivelas no Coração* (Odivelas in my Heart) is a cooperative movement of Odivelas citizens which has made an agreement with the *Banco*

Alimentar Contra a Fome. Every week this institution provides food parcels to around 100 families. MOC members mention that with the crisis there has been a reduction in the support provided by the *Banco Alimentar* as a result of the increase in numbers of applicants. To compensate for this, the MOC has looked for other forms of support at the local level.

In addition to this network of support providing meals and groceries to disadvantaged families in the Odivelas district, some schools continue to provide meals out of term time to disadvantaged children.

“That idea of having school canteens open in the holidays is also very important. I don’t know how some of the children would manage (...) The Parish Centre also gets a list from the school of the numbers of children they give meals to during the holidays. These measures are crucial for families.” Elsa, Member of the Parents’ Association at the Ramada Secondary School

Family Points of View

All families expressed great satisfaction with the support they receive in the form of Social Canteens. Moreover, some of them admitted that this is the only way they get to have a hot meal and that if they did not get this support they would continue to live in extreme poverty.

“Before I came to the Social Canteen I lived off what I could collect from bins and behind supermarkets ... I asked for help in cafés, cafeterias, restaurants... Thankfully I have a lot of friends, and we managed to eat, just about. Married, Year 9 Adult Education course, Unemployed, Couple with children

“While I was waiting to get a meal at the Canteen I ate bread and bananas, I had a friend who sometimes gave me something ... I bought biscuits ...I went hungry, I was weak, feeling ill.” Z., aged 49, Year 12 of schooling, divorced, retired, single person living alone

“Before coming here we had a lot of problems, we asked for help in cafés and so on, we went to Lidl, to the bins, I scavenged for food, it was still OK ...I picked up clothes from the bins and sold them for food ... that’s how it was (...) Meanwhile my father was put in jail a few months ago because he was dealing in scrap metal with a van with no tax disc or logbook and without a driving licence, my mother doesn’t work, nor do my brothers, and what she gets from Income Support is not enough to feed everyone, so I come here to the Canteen to get lunch and dinner for all of us. That is what helps us to get by.” X., aged 26, single, Year 9 of schooling, studying for a technical qualification, complex family household

"I get help here from the Social Canteen where I fetch lunch and dinner. The Canteen is very important because otherwise I couldn't survive." M, aged 64, lone parent family with a dependent son with mental disabilities

"When the crisis came I lost my job...I am a single mother aged 36, it was because of financial difficulties that I have to ask for food for myself and my son here in the Social Canteen." R., aged 36, single, unemployed, lone parent family (2 year-old son)

One of the families interviewed was so badly off that their adolescent daughter had to be referred to the Committee for the Protection of Minors because she showed signs of being undernourished. The family had to accept that the daughter be placed in a shelter near her home:

A., aged 47, married, year 6 of schooling, unemployed, couple with children

A. has always worked. She had several jobs, but always on a casual basis. When the crisis came, she was fired from her last job, as a cleaner in a cake factory. Her husband *"is still getting a bit of work"*, he is assistant to an upholsterer. They have a 14 year-old daughter, she goes to one of the schools in the district and likes studying. It was the school which realized that she was showing signs of tiredness and hunger. One of the teachers tried to talk to the young girl, but Z told a social worker that her mother had become unemployed and that *"things at home were not at all easy"*. Following a conversation with the Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People, A. had to decide *"the best for my daughter"* and allowed her to be taken into a shelter. When talking about this situation she says: *"It was very hard for me, the school saw that something wasn't right and called in the social worker. I had to let her go, but we see each other every day because she is still going to school close to home, and comes home every weekend."*

Giving disadvantaged families lunches and dinners is not the only role of the Social Canteen. According to users, the institution does something else which they find quite valuable. Every day, before families collect their meals, the cooks hand out various daily newspapers so that users may look for jobs and at the same time keep up to date with the current events.

"They also help us to find jobs. When we come here they always have the daily paper for us to look at job adverts and read the news." A., aged 47, married, Year 6 of schooling, unemployed, nuclear family

"I've read the paper here every day. They leave it here for us to see the ads and so on. But for the time being I can't, because first I have to find a crèche for my son. But I've spoken to them, they're going to help me do my CV and everything." R., aged 36, single, unemployed, lone parent family (son aged 2 years)

Although they have all said, on several occasions, that the Canteen is a tremendous help in improving their lives, they all hope one day to have enough to be able to do without the Parish Centre.

"What would help me would be my pension, when I get it, so that I could pay rent and so on ... at least so I could make something, even if it was just soup, so I don't have to come here, so I don't have to depend on others. It was the Social Security who sent me here. With the level of Income Support I was getting, it wasn't enough to buy food." M., aged 64, widow, technical qualification equivalent to year 9, lone parent family, dependent son with mental disabilities

"I didn't want to have to come here, but there's no alternative, I can't even do odd jobs, there's no work." Z., aged 49, Year 12 of schooling, divorced, retired, single person living alone

4. STAKEHOLDERS' SUGGESTIONS FOR POLICY MEASURES

Bearing the above observations in mind, stakeholders suggest social policies should be thought of for the long term so that they are not just ad hoc and one-off. They also suggest that any solutions should take into account regional, territorial and demographic differences.

"The country needs a 20-year strategy. What is needed is a social policy for the country, a strategy which looks 20 years ahead and deals with a country in which there is a clear divide between the littoral (the coast) and inland regions. This is a country of elderly people, yet there is no policy for them." Cristina Rafael, Director of the CCPR

Another suggestion is for policies which help those working on the ground and which take those professionals' true needs into account in their work for the people.

"There's a lack of support policies to help those who are in the front line. More support for Town Halls and Parish Councils so they can get closer to their residents. We need to drop the top-down politics, in which no opinions are asked and non-one looks at the ground." Tita, teacher, Representative on the Ramada Parish Council

“What’s lacking? Ongoing welfare solutions ... innovative solutions, for example a victim support service, because we’re getting more and more occurrences of domestic violence, against women and old people ... even now we’re still waiting for answers from Social Security ... We can’t do everything, can we? We can’t hire anyone because the organization hasn’t got enough money to take someone on.”

Vera and Cátia, Social Workers at the CCPR

A related suggestion is the need to oversee and review family support mechanisms. Several stakeholders see a major need for specialized technicians working in the field, monitoring families, going to their homes. This would help to monitor eligibility for support and provide proximity services to see how that support is being managed within each family.

“The income support given to families should be looked at and reviewed regularly, which currently they are, but I think there should be more technicians or assistants to monitor families on the ground and do home visits. To explain to people that there are time limits and that support is not forever”. Cristina Rafael, Director of the CCPR

Another stakeholder suggestion is for a reduction in bureaucracy. According to some, application procedures for some benefits are so complicated that it hinders the work of the institutions and prevents families from obtaining benefits.

“The bureaucracy which state institutions impose on voluntary organizations ... which work for nothing... on behalf of the state! Simplex (governmental programme to “simplify” bureaucracy), that was a good policy! But it has to be implemented! What state bureaucracy is really saying to people is: “Now why don’t you give up on this, eh?” – The President of MOC

Lastly, all stakeholders agree on the need for policies in support of local voluntary organizations to encourage the hiring of some technical or specialized staff (psychologists, social workers, cultural events organizers) and for the payment of these organizations’ utility bills and communications costs.

“Support for these organizations ... in some countries the state doesn’t give them money, but it pays their bills for rent, water, electricity...” António Boa-Nova, Member of the Board and Volunteer at MOC